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Mrs Sarah Curley
Headteacher
Castle Hill Primary School
Castle Hill Street
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Bolton
Lancashire
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Dear Mrs Curley

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Castle Hill Primary School, Bolton

Following my visit to your school on 15 January 2014, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report on the findings of my visit. Thank you for the help you gave me and for the time you made available to discuss the actions you are taking to improve the school since the most recent section 5 inspection.

The visit was the first monitoring inspection since the school was judged to require improvement following the section 5 inspection in October 2013. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Senior leaders and governors are taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the recent section 5 inspection. The school should take further action to:

- ensure all adults have high expectations of pupils so that instances of low-level behaviour and name-calling are tackled vigorously
- review the use of worksheets in English and mathematics so more-able pupils have greater opportunities to show what they can do by themselves
- refine your checks on teaching so there is a sharper focus on pupils' learning
- review how well the governing body currently operates and plan future actions which will help all governors gain a common understanding of their roles and responsibilities.

Evidence

During my visit, meetings were held with yourself, the deputy headteacher and the subject leaders for English and mathematics. I also met four members of the governing body and a local authority officer to discuss the action taken since the last

inspection. The school improvement plan was evaluated. School data, including the unvalidated 2013 results, were scrutinised. Your checks on teaching were also considered. We visited each classroom to talk to pupils, observe them at work and to look at their books. I also met with two small groups of Key Stage 2 pupils to gather their views on the school's progress.

Context

Since the October inspection, one member of staff is on extended leave.

Main findings

You are seizing the findings from the recent inspection and taking immediate action to tackle weaknesses. You are able to act with urgency because you were already making headway in moving towards being a good school. The strategies you introduced prior to the inspectors visiting the school, plus the strong contribution from your relatively new senior leaders, means you have firm foundations on which to build future success. Teachers know your expectations. All are following agreed teaching policies so pupils' skills and knowledge are being built on as they move from class-to-class. As a result, gaps are closing and there is less chance of pupils missing out on large chunks of their learning by the end of Year 6. This is beginning to make a difference to pupils' achievement. Your own data show standards remain below average but more pupils are making better progress from their starting points. The current Year 6 has already made the progress normally expected by the end of the year in reading; they are within a whisper of making similar progress in writing and mathematics.

Your well written action plan shows you have moved seamlessly onto the next stage of the school's development. You know what needs to happen to lift teaching so it is typically good day-in and day-out. Clear guidance and structured teaching approaches mean the quality and quantity of work in pupils' books is improving. Teachers cover a lot of ground in writing and mathematics. Nonetheless, some teachers use worksheets too often which is getting in the way of more-able pupils showing what they can do by themselves.

Subject leaders are doing their bit to drive improvement. Their helpful guidance means teachers are better at using the information they gather on pupils' achievement to steer learning so pupils can reach their individual goals. The appointment of 'shadow' subject leaders is helping you to develop the skills of middle leaders while supporting other leaders who have a lot on their plate.

Your checks on teaching are tight which means there is much less chance of weak teaching going unnoticed. Your feedback to teachers on their performance is clear and is helping them to improve their skills. Nonetheless, you do not always pay enough attention to pupils' learning when you are watching lessons or looking at books to make sure all pupils are getting the most out of teaching.

Pupils are mostly positive about the changes you are bringing to school. They recognise that some pupils find managing their own behaviour a real challenge.

Pupils think teachers manage poor behaviour well most of the time, but some are concerned that behaviour is not as good as it should be and poor behaviour gets in the way of learning. You recognise there is work to do with staff to make sure adults have high expectations of all pupils so that low-level behaviour and name-calling are tackled vigorously. Attendance is beginning to improve; there have been fewer short term exclusions than at this time last year.

The governing body has clear systems in place for checking the work of the school. As a result, they are in no doubt about the areas that require improvement. The desire to succeed has led to the Chair of Governors to forge stronger links with the local authority to make sure pupils with challenging behaviour gain the right support. Recent changes to the governing body mean there is a mixture of new and more experienced governors. The time is right for the governors to evaluate their own effectiveness and plan the steps they will take so all governors have a common understanding of their role and responsibilities.

Ofsted may carry out further visits and, where necessary, provide further support and challenge to the school until its next section 5 inspection.

External support

You feel the local authority support is meeting your needs because you had a hand in requesting this additional help. A local authority officer has supported you in writing the action plan and joint observations of teaching are giving you and the governing body confidence in your judgements. You have already established links with two headteachers who work in similar schools to share best practice.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body and the Director of Children's Services for Bolton.

Yours sincerely

Joanne Olsson
Her Majesty's Inspector